DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 471 328 CG 032 120

AUTHOR	Kaplan, David M.
TITLE	Pulling It All Together: The Vorset Family.
PUB DATE	2003-01-00
NOTE	21p.; In: Family Counseling for All Counselors; see CG 032 109.
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Counseling and Student Services Clearinghouse, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 201 Ferguson Building, P.O. Box 26171, Greensboro, NC 27402-6171 ($34.95). Tel: 336-334-4114; Tel: 800-414-9769 (Toll Free); Fax: 336-334-4116; e-mail: ericcass@uncg.edu; Web site: http://ericcass.uncg.edu.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Case Studies; *Counseling Techniques; Counselor Client Relationship; Counselor Training; Evaluation Methods; *Family Counseling; Intervention
IDENTIFIERS	Closure

ABSTRACT

The previous chapters of this book have looked at how to conceptualize family work, presented a process for conducting family counseling, and examined ways to fit this process into the counseling skills counselors have already developed in working with individual clients. Also discussed were approaches and techniques for establishing a relationship with families, assessing family issues related to the presenting problem, selecting family interventions, assessing family interventions, and reaching closure with families. To pull together all of this information, the author presents the Vorset Family, a composite of many families he has worked with over the years. The chapter provides a snapshot of the course of therapy with this family. (GCP)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 471 328

Pulling It All Together: The Vorset Family

by

David M. Kaplan

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CG032120

Chapter Twelve

Pulling It All Together: The Vorset Family

David M. Kaplan

Now we have reached the end of our journey. In the preceding chapters, we have looked at how to conceptualize family work, presented a process for conducting family counseling, and examined ways to fit this process into the counseling skills you have already developed in working with individual clients. We have discussed approaches and techniques for establishing a relationship with families, assessing family issues related to the presenting problem, selecting family interventions, assessing family interventions, and reaching closure with families. We have devoted chapters to the important issues of diversity and technology in family work, and have presented resources that will catalyze your continuing growth and development in family work.

To pull together all the information you have read in this book, I now present a brief glimpse of the Vorset family. With a nod to Gus Napier and Carl Whitaker, authors of *The Family Crucible,* I invented the Vorset family from a composite of many families I have worked with over the years. The remainder of this chapter provides a snapshot

of the course of therapy with this family.

The Beginning

My contact with the Vorsets began, as much of my family work does, with an individual session. Megan Vorset, a thirty-two-year-old graduate student in history, made an appointment because she was depressed and, as she stated, "feeling lousy." When I asked her to tell me more, she said, "I love history and majored in it as an undergraduate. I graduated from college ten years ago and was hired by a title insurance company because of my training in searching out historical documents. While I made good money, I hated the job because it ended up being more routine clerical work than anything else. I had always wanted to further my education in history and finally got up the nerve to apply to graduate school eight months ago. "I started graduate school last semester and really love the program. The professors are terrific and really know their stuff. But the farther I get into my history classes, the worse I feel. Help me!"

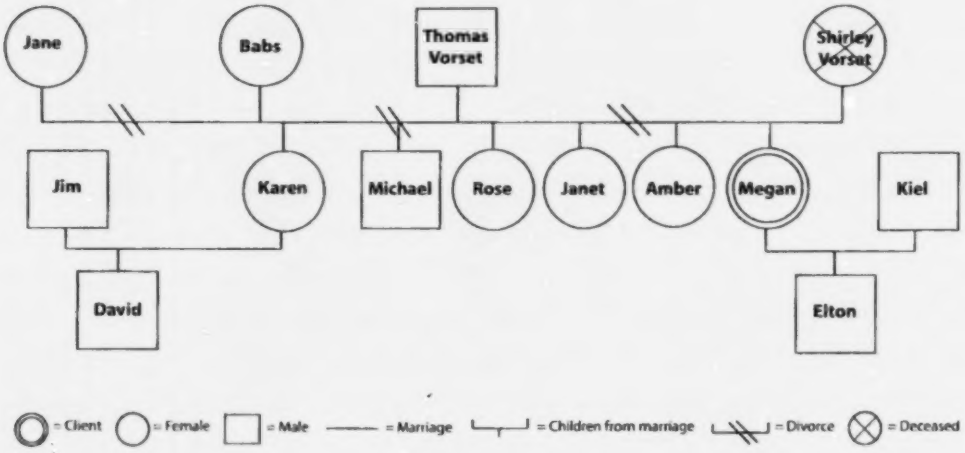
Establishing a Relationship

As with all clients, it was important to establish trust with Megan. I wanted her to know that I saw her as a person rather than a problem. So I said, "We clearly have very important issues to talk about and I am really glad you came in. Would it be okay if we take a step back so I can get to know you?"

Megan began to tell me about her family: "I am the youngest of four daughters. My sisters are Rose, Janet, and Amber. My parents have been divorced since I was three and mom died when I was five. My father has remarried twice, the first time to Babs and the second time to Jane. Dad and Babs have two children, Michael and Karen. Karen is married to Jim and they just had a son named David. I have been married to my husband, Kiel, for seven years. We have a five-year-old son, Elton. For some reason Elton doesn't like David, but other than that we all get along pretty well."

With all these names and relationships being thrown at me, I was becoming a little confused, so I asked Megan if we could construct a genogram (as discussed by Dennis Pelsma in chapter 5). I explained to her that a genogram is a way to make a visual road map of her family to help me understand who she is talking about when she names a particular person. I tacked a large piece of newsprint to the corkboard I had mounted on the back of my office door for just such purposes, and we spent the rest of the session talking about her family and developing the genogram shown in Figure 1.

Figure1. Vorset Family Genogram



As we completed the genogram and talked about her family, Megan became more comfortable with me. She saw that I was taking the time to get to know her world. What she didn't know was that she was also giving me useful assessment information.

Assessing the Problem

In constructing her genogram, Megan spent much time talking about her immediate family. She told me that her husband, Kiel, was an electrical engineer who worked at a local hydroelectric plant. Megan was very much in love with Kiel and felt that they had a terrific

marriage. There were some stresses, however. One was that Kiel was objecting to Megan's evening classes. He felt that the family should be together at night. He also had been objecting more and more to the hours that Megan spent in the library on the weekends. And recently he had been getting really angry that Megan was spending a lot of time at the homes of fellow students working on group projects.

Megan enjoyed telling me about her son, Elton. He was a typical five-year-old, loving and inquisitive and getting into anything and everything. Elton's favorite color was purple and his favorite TV show was "Tele-Tubbies." Megan stated that although he could be a handful, she could not imagine life without Elton. Recently, however, Elton had become less loving and more irritable. He had begun hitting Megan and refusing to kiss her goodnight. In the past, Elton would always run to Megan for comfort when he hurt himself. Now, when her son fell and started crying, he would call for his dad. This was breaking Megan's heart.

As we continued through the genogram, Megan told me about her nuclear family. Her father, Thomas Vorset, was an accountant with a local firm. Megan told me, "Dad is a pretty traditional guy. He even wears bow ties. He is much quicker to criticize than to hug, but I know that he loves me and that his bark is worse than his bite." Megan then told me about her mom. Shirley Vorset had been a secretary before she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and died when Megan had just turned five. Megan described the relationship with her mother as very close and stated that she was devastated when Mom died. She didn't remember much about her parents' divorce because it happened when she was three.

Megan stated that she got along quite well with both Babs and Jane, her dad's second and third wives. Megan also told me about her sisters Rose, Janet, and Amber. All three had gone straight into the workforce after high school and had become secretaries like their mother. Rose, Janet, and Amber all lived (as did Megan) in the same city they grew up in. Megan stated that all four sisters got along well and saw each other frequently. However, tension had been developing over the fact that Megan was missing the family's traditional weekend

get-togethers due to her school responsibilities.

Continuing with my assessment, I went through the BASIC ID (as discussed in chapter 3) with Megan. I noted with interest that in each area she kept returning to family issues. When I asked her what behaviors were associated with her depression, Megan stated that she withdrew from her husband and child and spent more time with her fellow graduate students. Her affect revolved around alternating feelings of resentment and loneliness toward Kiel, Elton, her sisters, and her dad. Sensations focused on a knot in the pit of her stomach. When I asked her to describe the images or pictures she saw in her head when the lousy feelings were at their worst, she stated that she very clearly saw a scene where her husband took her son and abandoned her. Megan's cognitions also focused on her family. When asked, "Word for word, what are the thoughts that go through your head when you are most depressed?" She replied, "My family is abandoning me at a time when I really need their support. Why don't they understand that graduate school is important to me? This could be the happiest time of my life, but my family is making it the most miserable. I feel like I have to choose between my happiness and their happiness."

Megan and I spent a lot of time focusing on the interpersonal relationship component of the BASIC ID. Ironically, she told me that she was spending less and less time with her father and sisters because every time she did make an effort to be with them, they complained that she didn't spend enough time with them. Her husband, Kiel, complained that she had changed and that he wanted the old Megan back. Elton didn't seem to want or need her any more and was now looking to Dad for the things Megan used to do for him.

Megan told me that as the interpersonal relationships with her family weakened, she had begun to seek out her fellow graduate students for support. She felt that her peers were empathetic and understood what she was going through in a way that her family did not. In addition, the students all had a common interest, history, which they loved to talk about. Megan stated that her family never asked about her classes, and that really hurt. One other issue worried Megan

about her interpersonal relationships. Eric, a fellow student, was taking a great interest in Megan and she was enjoying the attention. Nothing improper had happened yet, but Megan was afraid that she might have an affair with Eric if she continued to spend time with him.

The final area of the BASIC ID to assess was drugs/biology. Megan told me that she got headaches when she was feeling down. She had seen her physician, who had found nothing physically wrong and had concluded that the headaches were stress related. Other than that, Megan had no medical problems and took no medicines. She did not smoke or take any illegal drugs. In reviewing her history of alcohol use, Megan said that in the past she had drunk little alcohol, but was now getting used to it in social situations with her fellow students, as they always seemed to have a bottle of wine around. She did not see her drinking as a problem other than being concerned that it might lower her inhibitions around Eric.

Setting Goals

Megan had come to my office with the goal of feeling less depressed and "lousy." I pointed out that most of our discussion about her emotional pain kept coming back to family issues: a lack of empathy, the need for support, feelings of disengagement and resentment, and the fear that her husband would take her son and leave.

Because Megan's depression had its roots in family issues, I proposed that we set an additional goal: to figure out a way for Megan not to be caught in the middle between her family and her schooling. Our discussion had helped Megan to see the connection between her depression and family issues, and she readily agreed to add family work to the list of goals.

Selecting a Theoretical Framework

Because family dynamics were the cause of Megan's depression, I selected family systems theory (discussed in chapter 2) as my theoretical framework. As such, it was time to make an

suggestion to Megan. I stated, "In my experience, it is much more efficient and effective to deal with family issues by working with the entire family. What do you think of the idea of bringing your loved ones into my office so we can all talk directly about your depression and feelings of being caught in the middle? We can ask them for help and support."

Megan said that the thought of bringing her family into my office was scary and she wanted to think about it. When she came back for the next session she said, "I have been thinking a lot about how my family stresses are making me feel. So while I am nervous about it, I think bringing in my husband, child, dad, and sisters makes sense."

Megan and I spent the rest of the session brainstorming how best to approach each person to get his or her participation. Megan decided that she would simply talk to her family members and ask them to come to my office. I suggested that she focus on the positive: on how they would be able to help Megan because they might have good ideas for helping her be less depressed. We also revisited informed consent and confidentiality. I told her that because she had originally come in for individual counseling, I was bound to keep anything she had told me confidential in front of her family unless she gave me permission to disclose the information. I then asked Megan if there was anything we had talked about that she was not comfortable with me bringing up in front of her family. After thinking about it for a minute Megan said, "You can talk about anything you want except for Eric, the student I am attracted to. If Eric comes up, I want it to come from me." Given that Megan's feelings for Eric were a symptom of her disengagement from her family and not a primary cause of the family problems, I agreed to this stipulation.

We arranged a convenient time for the family to come in and ended the session. Two days later I received a phone call from Megan. "Everyone has said they will be there except for Dad. He refuses to come." I asked Megan if she wished me to call her father. She was grateful that I made the offer, and we brainstormed what I would say to him. When I called Mr. Vorset (Megan had kept her maiden name), he was surprised to hear from me. I explained that Megan needed her

family to help her through this difficult period. Mr. Vorset told me that he did not like the idea of going to a "shrink's" office and was uncomfortable talking about himself and his feelings. I replied, "I tell you what, I'll make you a deal. If you are willing to show your love for your daughter by coming to my office, you don't have to say anything. You are welcome to come and show support by your presence and can be as quiet as you wish." With the visit framed in such a manner and with permission not to talk if he didn't want to, Mr. Vorset agreed to attend the family session.

Establishing a Relationship with the Family

Even though I had established a relationship with Megan, I had to start all over again when her loved ones came for the family session—*especially because* her loved ones were there. Not only had her family members never met me, but I suspected that they believed I was on Megan's side because I had talked with her individually for a few sessions. This was evident from the way family members chose to seat themselves when they came into my office. Megan took the seat next to my chair. The rest of the family (including Megan's husband) took chairs on the other side of the office and clustered around each other. Visually, it looked like there were two teams: Megan and myself on one side of the room against Megan's family on the opposite side of the room. Interestingly, Megan's father placed his chair between the family cluster and my chair, almost as if he were protecting the family. I thought, "He looks like a potential gatekeeper to me!" It was clear that I would have to work especially hard at utilizing the ideas in chapter 4 to establish a relationship of trust with Megan's son, husband, father, and sisters.

I began by reviewing informed consent. As part of the discussion, I talked about the rules I like to set when working with families. I said, "One rule is that we are here to focus on strengths and how to help each other. We are not here to blame anyone for any problem or to beat up on anyone. Is that okay with everyone?" All heads nodded yes. I continued, "I would also like to set the rule that all family

members are free to talk when they choose and free to be quiet when they choose. No one has to talk if he or she would prefer not to. Is that also okay with everyone?" Again, everyone nodded in agreement, with Mr. Vorset making the most enthusiastic gesture. Finally, I asked for one more rule: "Because we are meeting as a family, I would like to speak to what might happen if you choose to talk to me alone after a family session, whether in person, on the telephone, by e-mail, or by letter. The information you give me might be crucial to discuss with the family. Therefore, I cannot promise you I will keep it confidential. So if you have information or thoughts that you do not want me to share in a family session, please do not tell them to me. Is that okay with everyone?" The family also agreed to this final rule.

I then followed the protocol for a first family session, as discussed in chapter 4. It soon became evident that Megan's dad was indeed the gatekeeper. His nonverbal gestures determined the order in which family members spoke about themselves. Even Kiel, Megan's husband, deferred to the patriarchy of Mr. Vorset. Violating his own edict not to speak, Mr. Vorset expressed concern that Elton should not be hearing this "adult conversation." I replied that children are smart and know a lot of things. Therefore, it was unlikely that we would be discussing anything that Elton was not already aware of on some level. I then said to Mr. Vorset, "If the family feels that we have begun to talk about a topic that Elton should not be listening to, we can ask him to draw in some coloring books in our play room under the watchful eye of my office manager. Will this work for you?" Mr. Vorset thought about it for a moment and agreed.

Since Mr. Vorset was the gatekeeper, I decided to make him my co-therapist. I asked Mr. Vorset if it would be okay for me to get to know the family, and he nodded yes. I then took the time to learn about each family member, making sure to include Megan's five-year-old son, Elton (who confirmed that his favorite color was purple).

At this point, I felt that it would be useful to talk about goals. I stated, "We have all come together to help Megan, but everyone in this room is important. As such, it is valuable for me to hear each family member's goals for our work. What would all of you like to get out of our time together?" Megan's husband, Kiel, spoke first.

He said that it was difficult for him to see Megan depressed and that he wanted to see Megan being her old self again. Rose, Megan's eldest sister, stated, "I miss Megan. I never get to see her anymore, and I want that to change." Janet, the middle sister chimed in, "I agree. Our family get-togethers are not the same without her." There was anger in Amber's voice as she said, "As the two youngest girls, Megan and I always did everything together. We don't anymore."

Mr. Vorset had been silently watching his family, so I asked him if he wanted to add anything. His reply was, "Not really. Everything that has been said is correct. We need the old Megan back." At that point I realized that everyone except Elton had spoken about goals. So I looked at him and asked, "Elton, what would you like?" He replied, "I want Mommy and Daddy to stop fighting and to stay married!"

We were getting close to the end of our first family session. I asked the Vorsets one last question: "If we could wave a magic wand and everything was the way it used to be, would everything be okay or would there still be issues for the family to work on?" Janet spoke up. "We have a very loving and good family. But sometimes I wish that Dad weren't so sexist and old-fashioned." Rose glared at Janet, and I made a mental note to watch for an alliance between Mr. Vorset and his eldest daughter. I asked Rose if she would like to add working on gender issues to our goals. Ignoring her sister's glare, Janet shook her head yes.

Suddenly, Amber began to cry. I handed her a tissue but otherwise remained silent as everyone's attention was drawn to this unexpected display of emotion. Amber lightly sobbed for a minute and said almost in a whisper, "We have never dealt with Mom's death. We never talk about her. Dad won't let us." All three sisters reached for the tissues, and Elton went over to his aunt, crawled on her lap, and gave her a big hug. Mr. Vorset, clearly uncomfortable with this topic, announced that it was time to go.

I ended the session with a summary that focused on the goals presented by all family members. I thanked everyone and stated that we were meeting to help both Megan and the family feel more comfortable and less angry with each other. I then invited them to set

a five-session contract. I must have done something right, because they all agreed to continue our work together as a family.

Assessing Family Issues

I took the time over the next few sessions to conduct a developmental differential diagnosis as discussed by Dennis Pelsma in chapter 5. I assessed the four areas that have an effect on healthy family balance: communication, problem solving, roles, and boundaries. Each area presented useful information:

Communication

For the most part, the Vorset family exhibited healthy communication patterns. They spoke directly to each other and expressed both positive and negative emotions to each other. There was some triangulation among the sisters: Rose, Janet, and Amber complained to each other about Megan's school commitments. Also there was clearly a family rule set by Dad that the family was not to talk about Mom, her illness, or her death.

Problem Solving

I asked the family how they dealt with conflict. Kiel, Megan's husband, said that he and Megan rarely had fights and that when there was an occasional disagreement, they just ignored it and waited for it to pass.

Megan spoke up for her sisters and said that her family of origin dealt with problems by doing what Dad wanted. All three sisters nodded in agreement as their father smiled slightly. I then asked Megan why that did not work now. She replied, "Going to graduate school is too important to me. I am not going to quit and be the good housewife Dad thinks I should be. For the first time in my life, I am going to do what I want to do."

Elton had not said anything, so I asked him what he liked to do

when there was fighting. He replied, "I give Mommy and Daddy a kiss, and that makes them feel better." I then asked him why he had been hitting Mom recently instead of kissing her. He exclaimed, "Because the kissing doesn't work anymore!"

Roles

I spent quite a bit of time discussing family roles with the Vorsets. It became clear that Mr. Vorset had fairly rigid gender stereotypes. He stated that women do best when they stay home and raise the kids and that men do best when they go out and make money for the family. I then asked him if his irritation at Megan had to do with the fact that she was in graduate school. He replied, "Of course. It was bad enough when she worked for the title insurance company, but at least she was able to come home and take care of her family at five o'clock. Now she is always gone. While Kiel does his best, her house is a mess and Elton never gets to see her." Kiel, Megan's husband, was much more flexible about gender roles. He told me that he did not mind doing extra cooking, cleaning, and housework because of Megan's academic requirements. He was upset only that he and Elton had so little time to spend with Megan. Interestingly, Megan had more gender issues than her husband. She stated that she was greatly appreciative of the extra work Kiel did around the house. Then she said, "I feel terribly guilty that, as a mother, I am putting my graduate studies before my son." I made a mental note to address gender issues (as discussed by Fran Steigerwald in chapter 9) with Megan and her family.

Boundaries

In statement after statement, Kiel, Elton, Rose, Janet, Amber, and Mr. Vorset, told me that they felt disengaged from Megan. They spoke of the graduate history program as if it were a thief that had been robbing them of time with Megan. Clearly, helping Megan and her family increase intimacy and move from disengagement to interdependence (while still allowing Megan to enjoy and finish

graduate school) was going to be a major part of our work.

Selecting an Intervention

Based upon the goals and assessment information provided by Megan and her family, I decided to take a solution-focused approach (as discussed by Richard Watts in chapter 6). Why? Because, in my view, the Vorsets were basically a loving, healthy, functional family that simply had come up against a problem they couldn't solve. In the past, Megan had resolved conflicts by either doing what her father wanted (in her family of origin) or agreeing to ignore the problem until it went away (in her marriage). However, this issue was different. Going to graduate school was so important to Megan that she felt she had to break the family rule and stand up for her needs against her father's wishes. Megan also found that the stresses created by her decision to go to graduate school were too great to ignore with her husband and son.

Getting into my solution-focused framework, I asked the family to come to a consensus about the first goal that needed to be addressed. Universally, the answer came back, "We need to have the old Megan back." I then turned to Megan and asked her to tell us what would have to happen in order for this to happen. Megan replied, "Well, the first thing that needs to happen is that I need to stop feeling torn between my family and school." I then turned to the entire family and asked, "What specific things can each of you do to help alleviate Megan's feelings of being caught between her family and her studies?"

Janet spoke up first, "We could ask Megan to tell us more about her program." "In fact," Rose chimed in, "we could have Megan give us a tour of the campus." I asked Megan if these things would help. She smiled, "No one asks me about my classes. I would love to talk about them and to show my family where I go to school." I then asked the family if they would be willing to set two family gatherings, one to talk about Megan's program and the other to go on a tour of the university. Amber offered to cook dinner the following Friday for the "program discussion" task. Kiel then stated that he

and Megan had a big SUV that everyone could pile into to go to the campus together. All agreed to have Megan give them a tour the following Sunday.

I then turned to Megan's father. "Mr. Vorset, what do you think needs to happen in order to get the old Megan back?" I knew that he wanted to say that Megan should drop out of school and focus on her family. But he didn't, in large part because he had now directly seen the pain that Megan's dilemma was causing her. So instead he replied, "She needs to spend more time with her family." All the family shook their heads affirmatively upon hearing this, with Megan's husband and son showing the most vigor. "This seems to be a particularly important issue," I stated. "Let's begin to problem solve how Megan can spend more time with her husband, son, father, and sisters while at the same time still being able to devote the time she needs to her schoolwork. Megan, what ideas do you have?"

Megan frowned as she thought "I could set aside some specific down time." I encouraged her to continue. "I don't have classes on Tuesday or Thursday evenings. I could read Elton a story on those two evenings." I asked Elton if he would like that and he smiled broadly. The family continued to problem solve and came up with two additional decisions. Megan, Kiel, and Elton would set aside every Saturday afternoon from noon to three o'clock and do something fun together, such as watching a movie or visiting the zoo. Additionally, Megan's sisters would rotate hosting a family get-together every second Sunday afternoon.

This initial discussion was the beginning of a focus on giving both Megan and her entire family support in the face of a system that had changed homeostasis. In future sessions we continued to brainstorm ideas for supporting all family members. In order to help Megan, all three of her sisters agreed to baby-sit Elton once a week. This would give Megan some guilt-free study time and allow Elton to spend more time with his aunts. In keeping with the suggestions Stevens and Shulman offer in chapter 10, I asked if it would be helpful to set up a listserv for family members of the other students in Megan's history program. Kiel got quite excited about this idea and volunteered to contact all the students in Megan's program and ask for e-mail

addresses of family members who might be interested in setting up an electronic support network.

During the third family session, after basic problem solving had been discussed in the solution-focused paradigm, I decided it was time to address two other issues. I asked the family if they would be interested in dealing with a couple of emotional family issues: gender roles and coming to closure about Shirley Vorset's death. It was clear that the decision as to whether these topics were going to be approached lay with Mr. Vorset, and everyone in the room could not help but look at him expectantly. I think he surprised us all when he said, "I know I come from the old school, and I know that my feelings about my daughters' mom have hurt us all. But I can't talk about it in front of my girls." He then looked at me, saying, "Can I set up a time to talk to you about it alone, man to man?" And that was the beginning of going in and out of individual counseling with Thomas Vorset, where I found the concepts discussed in the chapter on diversity issues and the scenarios focusing on balancing family work against simultaneous individual counseling (chapter 11) to be of great help.

Assessing the Interventions

In order to monitor the impact of my work with the Vorset family, I decided to utilize the circumplex model discussed by Steven Benish in chapter 7. As we went along, I regularly assessed the cohesion, flexibility, and communication patterns of the Vorset family. I observed that as the family focused on supporting Megan instead of giving her a hard time, there were increasing amounts of laughter, joke telling, and smiling. Little Elton stopped hitting his mom and started giving her goodnight kisses again. Megan came in beaming one day saying, "Elton fell off the swing last night and came running to me for a hug. That is the first time in months he has chosen me instead of his dad!"

The family seating pattern even changed. At the beginning of our work together, the Vorset family had physically distanced themselves from Megan—visually isolating her and nonverbally

labeling her as the identified patient. Now the family sat close together, and there were frequent gestures of physical affection such as hand holding and light touches. The Vorsets also spent more time talking directly to each other about disagreements instead of triangulating. The family was clearly moving away from disengagement and toward greater intimacy.

Megan began to let go of her resentment at the family for keeping her from her studies, and Kiel and Megan's sisters started to let go of their anger over the time Megan was spending on class projects and at the library. Everyone was adjusting to the change in family homeostasis in a healthy and flexible way.

Somewhere around the eighth family session, I received an e-mail from Megan about Eric, her fellow graduate student. She wrote, "I wanted you to know that I no longer am concerned about having an affair with Eric. I still think he is a neat guy, but I now realize that my feelings were a result of being emotionally separated from my husband. Now that Kiel and I don't fight about school and are back on track, I would never jeopardize my marriage by doing something stupid with Eric."

Chapter 7 points out that the circumplex model encourages us to assess the family's flexibility around roles, leadership, and family rules. I kept this in mind as I worked with Mr. Vorset on gender issues and his rule about avoiding any mention of his daughters' mother. A positive step occurred when, after a few individual sessions, Mr. Vorset said to me, "You know, we really should be having this conversation with my kids. Let's continue this discussion at the next family session."

What followed were some very painful but important family sessions. Megan, Rose, Janet, and Amber got a chance to talk to their father about his views on women, and Mr. Vorset was able to deal with a family secret he had been keeping for decades. It turned out that he had initiated the divorce with Shirley. Mr. Vorset felt that it was the man's role to earn the family wages and the woman's role to stay home with the kids. His wife, however, had insisted on working after she had children, which both enraged and emasculated Mr. Vorset. He gave Shirley an ultimatum to either quit her job or get a

divorce. When she refused to quit, Mr. Vorset filed divorce papers, even though he very much loved his wife. Within a few years after the divorce, Shirley developed ovarian cancer and died. Mr. Vorset was convinced that there was link between the stress of the divorce and the development of the cancer. He felt that somehow his actions had killed the mother of his children. That was why he had forbidden the children to mention her name in his presence. He could not stand the guilt.

As Mr. Vorset finally shared his secret after all these years, his children saw him cry for the first time. As he wept, his daughters went over, one by one, to hug him. I have a lasting memory of four daughters and a father holding each other and having the cry of their lives. This benchmark moment marked the beginning of dealing with a ghost that had been haunting the family for many years.

Reaching Closure

After working with Megan and her family for about four months, it became clear that our work was nearing completion. The family had achieved a new homeostasis that allowed Megan to incorporate both school and family into her life. It was time to plan for closure.

I suggested to the family that we change from our weekly meeting schedule to sessions every other week. Things had been getting better, so the family readily agreed to this change. After another month, we decided to continue to spread out sessions and meet once a month, in order to make sure that the family did not backslide into old patterns.

As I got closer to ending my relationship with the Vorset family, I was mindful of Steven Craig and Gary Bischof's point in chapter 8 that it is important to plan a way to say goodbye. We set a specific date for the last session, and I asked each family member to think about how he or she would like to end our counseling relationship. I also told them that I would think about how I wanted to say goodbye.

When the last session arrived, family members had thought up different approaches. Megan's sisters had baked a cake with "Thank

You" written in blue icing across the top. We polished off the entire cake during the session. Megan's dad said that he wanted to shake my hand. He told me that he hadn't thought much of "shrinks" in the past, but that I had changed his opinion.

Elton couldn't wait to give me a gift-wrapped present. When I opened it, I saw two crayon drawings. Both depicted the family. In the first drawing, everyone was frowning or crying and the colors were somber shades of black, brown, and dark red. In the second picture, everyone was smiling. There were birds and the sun, and the colors were bright and cheerful. I asked Elton about the difference between the pictures. He said, "The first one was before. The second one is now."

Kiel stated that he wanted to say goodbye by thanking his extended family. He said, "I know this has not been easy for anyone. We have all had to look at issues and make compromises. But now Megan is happy again, and that is all that counts. I salute all of you!"

Megan was the last family member to take a turn. She said that she, too, wanted to thank her family for their support. She no longer had to choose between her family and her graduate studies. Megan said she wanted to say goodbye by giving each of us a hug. She went around and embraced her husband, son, father, sisters, and me, one by one.

Finally, it was my turn to say goodbye. I had decided to borrow the idea in Steven Craig's and Gary Bischof's closure chapter of using certificates to say goodbye. Using my computer, I created the following document:

This certificate is hereby given to the Vorset family in honor of the healthy balance they have achieved.

Signed,
David M. Kaplan, Ph.D.

I told them that I was proud of the way that they had effectively dealt with their family issues and handed a certificate to each family member. With some final words, handshakes, and hugs, my work with the Vorset family had come to an end.

Conclusion

Megan Vorset had come to my office stating that she was depressed and "feeling lousy." Given her particular situation, I cannot imagine how I could have helped her in individual counseling alone. Megan needed to deal with issues that were affecting her entire family. Therefore, systems theory was the theoretical framework of choice and family counseling was the primary modality of choice.

In conducting counseling with the Vorset family, I was able to reach beyond Megan to help her loved ones. I assisted the family to resolve issues that had been festering for decades due to a family secret. This would not have been possible if I had taken a linear approach and selected individual counseling as my modality with Megan. All in all, the Vorsets were a good example of why it is useful for counselors to work with families across counseling specialties.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

	This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.
X	This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").